

SC Farm to School

...connecting farms to the community

At its core, Farm to School is about building relationships between local foods, school children, and the community. For many children, school provides the only nutritious meal of the day. Introducing children to locally grown fruits and vegetables and promotes healthy eating and a greater appreciation of agriculture.



Benefits of Farm to School:

- New markets for farmers
- Healthier and fresher meals for children
- Increases community awareness about the importance of agriculture
- Increases food security by reducing the distance between producer and consumer



Find out more!

The SCDA offers farmers free assistance for the GAP certification process. If you choose to participate in the Farm to School program, you may be eligible to receive a reimbursement for the cost of your GAP certification audit.

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Supporting

Farms

Creating

Markets

Building

Community



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GAP Certification... what is it?

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) was developed by the USDA in 1998 as a set of standards and practices to minimize microbial hazards during the growing, harvesting, and packing of fresh produce.

Each GAP certification audit is different depending on the farm. GAP audits are performed by a USDA auditor and are based on a checklist that can be found on the web at www.ams.usda.gov. The farm checklist covers:

1. General Questions (worker hygiene)
2. Farm Review
3. Field Harvest & Field Packing
4. House Packing Facility (if applicable)
5. Storage & Transportation (if applicable)

80% compliance is required in per section in order to pass the audit.

GAP lowers the risk of lawsuits and increases market opportunities.

What others are saying:

"I enjoy the challenge of keeping up the standard. Once you do it and get into the feel of it, it's part of everyday life. When I come out in the morning to pull an order, I know what process I have to go through, so I just go ahead and do it and everything works out fine." – *Al Williams, Al Williams Enterprises, Inc.*

"It's never been easier to implement a farm food safety plan than right now. I help farms with GAP certification everyday and have a 100% success rate. Becoming GAP certified opens up many more market opportunities for South Carolina farms. I encourage everyone to consider GAP certification for their fresh fruit and vegetable operation." - *Weatherly Thomas, SC Dept. of Agriculture Food Safety Coordinator*

A SC Success Story...

GAP Certification makes it possible to sell produce directly to local schools and grocery stores. It can increase a farm's credibility and overall food safety.

Originally, Walter and Cathy Earley did not plan on becoming GAP certified. When they heard about a GAP certification workshop being held in Charleston County, they decided to attend. The workshop connected them with Farm to School Regional Coordinator Hannah Mikell, who convinced them that selling strawberries to local schools could be profitable. Over the next few weeks, the Earley's partnered with SCDA employees to become GAP certified, resulting in the sale of fresh produce to Berkeley County schools. According to Walter Earley, the changes the farm made were "minor" and "well worth the effort."

During the GAP certification process, the Earley's began communicating with Linda Fairchild, Berkeley County School District Child Nutrition Director. Together, they found a mutually beneficial way for the farm to put fresh, local strawberries directly into the hands of the students of Berkeley County. Less than a month and a half after the initial GAP certification workshop, Hickory Bluff Farms sold fresh strawberries to the local school district for the first time.

Walter Earley says that he has "enjoyed selling to the schools and hopes to continue to provide fresh food to children." In addition to schools, GAP certification has made it possible to sell to local grocery stores. Shortly after becoming certified, Piggly Wiggly expressed interest in purchasing his produce. As the new school year approaches, the Earleys plan on adding more acres and continuing to expand their "growing" business to meet the growing demand for fresh SC produce.

